

# The Rhetoric of Faith in 1 John

## Abstract

Like the Gospel of the same name, the First Letter of John uses the language of faith (*πιστεύω κτλ.*) extensively. The letter is aimed at encouraging faith (3:23). A key expression within the encouragement of faith is the reference to ‘our faith’ which overcomes the world (5:4). This faith is often understood in primarily cognitive terms, arguing that correct propositional belief overcomes the world. While this reflects an important component of the language of faith in 1 John, it misses another significant aspect. The language of faith within the letter is not only geared towards a correct cognitive response, for the language of faith also contributes to exhorting the audience to right action. The expression *ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν* (5:4) functions to sum up both the call to right cognitive belief and right action, for it is enduring in both which overcomes the world.

Keywords: faith; 1 John; ethics; rhetoric; social identity

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The First Letter of John uses the language of faith (*πιστεύω κτλ.*) extensively. The purpose of the letter is arguably to encourage faith along with love (3:23). The language of faith comes to a climax in chapter five where it is ‘our faith’ which conquers (5:4). This faith is often understood in primarily cognitive terms, that it is correct propositional belief that overcomes the world. While this reflects one important dimension of the language of faith in 1 John, it misses another significant dimension. When the letter is read as a whole, we find that the language of faith is not only geared towards a correct cognitive response. Rather, the language of faith also contributes to exhorting the audience to right action as well as right thinking. An analysis of the persuasive function of the language of faith will enable the broader rhetorical function to be seen.

Determining the rhetorical function of the language of faith in 1 John requires beginning with a consideration of audience and setting, including the context of the opponents who are glimpsed in the letter. This will be followed by an analysis of the use of faith language with particular consideration of its effect for an early audience. Surprisingly, while the frequency of faith language in 1 John means that commentaries deal with many of the specific instances, there have been no recent attempts at a concerted study of the use of faith language in this letter.<sup>1</sup> The following analysis will not focus on Graeco-Roman rhetorical categories, for while the letter shows some influence of Graeco-Roman rhetoric, the form of the letter does not closely align with the forms of rhetoric that feature in contextual rhetorical discussions.<sup>2</sup> Yet the letter displays a rhetorical purpose (or purposes)

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the lack of excurses in commentaries dealing with the topic (in contrast to what is found with the Gospel of John), as well as the absence of a chapter on the Johannine Epistles in the recent wide-ranging work edited by Jörg Frey et al., *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). In addition, the chapter on ‘faith’ in the *Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (by Catrin Williams, 2018) deals only with the Gospel of John.

<sup>2</sup> Some have used Graeco-Roman rhetorical categories to analyse 1 John, such as: D. F. Watson, “Amplification Techniques in 1 John: The Interaction of Rhetorical Style and Invention,” *JSNT* 51, no. 1 (1993), 99–123; B. Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). However, others have critiqued these approaches for pushing such categories onto the text, so E. Wendland, “The Rhetoric of Reassurance in First John: ‘Dear Children’ versus the ‘Antichrists’,” *Neot* 41, no. 1 (2007): 177. Lieu avoids asserting that the author knew formal Graeco-Roman rhetoric,

including persuading the audience towards certain responses and away from others. In this way, the broad category of epideictic rhetoric is applicable, with the purpose of inspiring a certain way of life.<sup>3</sup> When we consider the rhetoric of 1 John, the primary question is the nature of responses that the text seeks to evoke.

In order to assess the rhetorical function of the language of faith in 1 John, the argument will proceed in three principal stages. First, the intended audience and the role of the opponents will be considered, in order to identify to whom the language of faith is addressed. Second, the function of the text in encouraging adherence to right doctrine will be examined. Third, the place of ethical exhortation and its connection to the language of faith in 1 John will be assessed. This will enable conclusions to be made regarding the rhetoric of faith in 1 John.

## Audience and Outgroup

Identification of persuasive intent must begin with identifying the intended audience of the rhetoric of faith. Discussions of the audience in 1 John often focus on identifying a real-world audience, as we might with the Pauline epistles. But the lack of concrete details of places or individuals means that the audience and setting of 1 John are contested. Debate has centred on the identification of the opponents that the author refers to, with characterisations of these

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noting that there are occasional parallels but overall the letter is not an argument. J. Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 14–5.

Noting the ‘meagre results’ from approaches using a Graeco-Roman rhetorical lens, she advocates a broader rhetorical reading. J. M. Lieu, “Us or You? Persuasion and Identity in 1 John,” *JBL* 127, no. 4 (2008): 806–7.

<sup>3</sup> R. Roitto, “Identity in 1 John: Sinless Sinners who Remain in Him,” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (eds. J. B. Tucker, et al.; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 493; Watson, “Amplification Techniques,” 118–20.

opponents range from proto-Gnostic or Cerinthian groups, through to Jews who reject the messianic identity of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The focus on identifying a concrete setting overlooks how little specific information we have about the opponents. Unlike comparable situations where opponents are named (3 John 9–10; 2 Tim 1:15; 4:10), no opponents are named nor are specific actions described. The lack of concrete details suggests caution in determining a concrete setting for the letter. Instead of seeking a real-world identification of the opponents, this paper will focus on the intended audience of the text as well as how the opponents as depicted in the letter might relate to that intended audience.

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<sup>4</sup> Those seeing proto-Gnostic opponents include Wendland, “Rhetoric of Reassurance”: 174; D. G. van der Merwe, “‘Having Fellowship with God’ According to 1 John: Dealing with the Intermediation and Environment through which and in which it is Constituted,” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 8 (2006): 168–9; G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 75; R. E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 104–6. Those seeing Jewish opponents include T. Rasimus, “Johannine Opponents, The Gospel of John, and Gnosticism,” in *Nag Hammadi à 70 ans: qu'avons-nous appris? Nag Hammadi at 70: What Have We Learned?* (eds. E. Crégheur, et al.; Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 209; D. R. Streett, *They Went Out from Us: The Identity of the Opponents in First John* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 358–60; B. Olsson, “‘All My Teaching Was Done In Synagogues...’ (John 18:20),” in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar* (eds. G. van Belle, et al.; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 206; T. Griffith, *Keep Yourselves from Idols: A New Look at 1 John* (JSNTSup 233; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 204–11.

Approaching the text through a literary and rhetorical lens, using insights from Social Identity Theory, rather than taking a primarily historical approach enables us to analyse how the opponents are presented in the text. As we will see, the shadowy presentation is because the outgroup is not the focus of the letter, and its purpose is not to address them or refute their views.<sup>5</sup> This does not preclude there being a real group who has departed, but rather it recognises the limitations of the data we have and thus focuses on the function of the text rather than what might lie behind it.<sup>6</sup> Social identity theory provides the language of ingroup and outgroup, which avoids either value-laden terms such as ‘heretics’ or ‘schismatics’, as well as rejecting any specific identification of the groups with real-world groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Thus Griffith argues that the text does not positively state and refute the views of the opponents, implying a pastoral rather than polemical purpose. T. Griffith, “A Non-Polemical Reading of 1 John: Sin, Christology and the Limits of Johannine Christianity,” *TynBul* 49, no. 2 (1998): 255. Cf. J. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SP 18; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 85. Lieu argues that any polemicising is subordinated to the internal concern. J. M. Lieu, “‘Authority to Become Children of God’: A Study of 1 John,” *NovT* 23, no. 3 (1981): 212.

<sup>6</sup> While Schmid is right to argue that 1 John is insufficient to identify the opponents in any detail, the evidence does not support reading those opponents as a mere rhetorical construct as he does. H. Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically,” *Bib* 85, no. 1 (2004): 33,37. Rather, as Painter argues, the apocalyptic language indicates a real and significant schism experienced by the audience. J. Painter, “The ‘Opponents’ in 1 John,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 49. Roitto speaks of a shared memory of the secessionists whilst warning that the rhetorical purpose of the text means that the characterisation of the outsiders may be unreliable. Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 497, 502.

Differentiating from other groups is understood to be a universal part of group dynamics, involving some concept of us and them (which may or may not be hostile).<sup>7</sup> The language of ingroup and outgroup fits with the way that 1 John focuses on the ingroup, and the outgroup is understood as ‘other’.

### *Building the Outgroup*

The letter begins, after a prologue, by addressing the audience with a mix of correction and assurance. The audience do not have everything right, but in the author’s view they are on the right side.<sup>8</sup> The use of fellowship (*χοινωνία* 1:3, 6–7) and the first-person plural ‘we’ in 1:1–5

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<sup>7</sup> Tajfel and Turner are the formative source here, discussing differentiation and its role in fostering ingroup identity. H. Tajfel and J. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (eds. W. G. Austin, et al.; Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979). Brewer develops this idea in terms of which situations lead to such differentiation being hostile. M. B. Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict: When Does Ingroup Love Become Outgroup Hate?,” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction* (eds. R. D. Ashmore, et al.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> There are indications of opposing views in these early parts of the letter, but Griffith has shown with contextual parallels that these are primarily rhetorical devices to aid the author in making his point. Griffith, “A Non-Polemical Reading”: 257–60. The fact that the audience are ‘on the right side’ aligns with a key purpose of the letter being to provide assurance, as well as supporting the interpretation that the focus is on the ingroup not the outgroup. Arguing for a purpose of assurance are: S. Rockwell, “Assurance as the Interpretative Key to Understanding the Message of 1 John,” *RTR* 69, no. 1 (2010); Wendland, “Rhetoric of Reassurance”: 178; Lieu, “Authority to Become”: 212.

include the audience with the author in establishing a common identity.<sup>9</sup> But then comes the mention of ‘antichrists’ and those who ‘went out from us’ (2:18–19). This group is characterised in two key ways. The first is that they did not belong to the group, therefore they are an outgroup. The second is they reject a key point of doctrine, a point that is described in several ways but is centrally christological (2:22–23). The identification of an outgroup leads to questions around the identity of this outgroup, and the relationship of the argument of the letter to the outgroup.

This out-group is characterised as trying to deceive the audience (2:26). The author makes a rhetorical move to connect the out-group as deceivers (2:26; 3:7) with sin and by extension the danger of being deceived into such sinful actions (3:7–10). Their error is not merely doctrinal but ethical as well. One exception to the ingroup ethical focus that Lieu observes comes in 3:7–10, where a characterisation as deceivers and the assertion of attachment to the devil (3:8,10) are combined to attribute ethical failures to the outsiders.<sup>10</sup> While in 2:20–27 the concern is with possible doctrinal deception, that cannot be separated from being led astray in action as well as thought. The characterisation of the outgroup as liars, deceivers, and unrighteous on one hand, but also ‘not of us’ is an attempt to distance them intellectually, practically, and relationally.

Finally, the language of faith is used in reference to these opponents in chapter 4. The importance of the warning of 4:1–3 is highlighted by the introduction *Ἄγαπητοί*, with the

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<sup>9</sup> The presentation of fellowship as a goal of the letter further suggests a strong ingroup identity as the positive aim which is supported by constructing an outgroup for differentiation. Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 495. van der Merwe identifies fellowship as a main objective of the letter. van der Merwe, “Having Fellowship”: 172.

<sup>10</sup> Lieu, “Authority to Become”: 222–4.

switch from first to second person and the direct address functioning rhetorically to grab the attention of the audience.<sup>11</sup> The motifs of christological confession and antichrist in 4:2–3 indicate this is a continuation of the warning against the out-group that has already featured.<sup>12</sup>

The audience are warned not to believe all spirits ( $\muὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε$  4:1).

Contextual studies of  $\piστεύω$  κτλ., such as the work of Teresa Morgan, have suggested that the semantic range of  $\piστεύω$  includes both relational trust and propositional belief.<sup>13</sup> In what follows, it will be shown that a concern for right propositional belief is a significant aspect of the use of  $\piστεύω$  in 1 John. However, that focus should not be understood as

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<sup>11</sup> Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> J. R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John : An Introduction and Commentary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; TNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 155–6.

<sup>13</sup> T. Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Morgan contends that the relational idea of trust is primary in the Graeco-Roman world. However, her contention that the same priority holds in the New Testament has received significant critique, see F. Watson, M.A. Seifrid and T. Morgan, “Quaestiones disputatae: Roman Faith and Christian Faith,” *NTS* 64 (2018), 258–9. Other contextual studies on faith include D. R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); G. Barth, “Pistis in hellenistischer Religiosität,” *ZNW* 73, no. 1 (1982). See also M. Silva, “ $\piστεύω$ ,” *NIDNTTE* 3:760–1; R. Bultmann, “ $\piστεύω$ ,” *TDNT* 6:177–80.

excluding a relational dimension, and at least in 4:16 there is more attention to a relational aspect.<sup>14</sup>

Here in 4:1 a propositional sense is at least partially in view, given the earlier links between the outgroup and denying key doctrine, and the author of the letter is warning his audience about accepting such misguided ideas.<sup>15</sup> Yet the object of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  is ‘spirits’ rather than their teaching. The second half of the verse indicate that these ‘spirits’ are effectively equivalent to the false prophets who have gone out.<sup>16</sup> Thus the primary idea is not trusting those who are false prophets, although that necessarily entails not trusting their message. In this broader context of actions and influence, another way of framing the warning against believing or trusting the spirits is as a warning against giving one’s allegiance to them, conveying the idea that more than merely internal assent or rejection is involved.<sup>17</sup> There is a function of boundary setting in this use of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$ , as seen with Lieu’s suggestion that 4:2–3 functions as a doctrinal test for the community to use, identifying those who are in and out

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<sup>14</sup> That the author envisages a trusting relationship with Jesus and the Father is also conveyed through talk of fellowship (1:3,6), love (2:5,15; 3:1,17; 4:7–12,19–21), abiding (2:24,28; 3:24; 4:12–16), and familial imagery (3:1–2,10; 4:7; 5:1).

<sup>15</sup> R. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 198–200; Stott, *Letters of John*, 152; I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 204.

<sup>16</sup> Stott, *Letters of John*, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Bultmann sees the idea of coming under the power of the spirits. R. Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 61; Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 132.

(cf. 2 John 7–11; 1 Cor 12:1–3).<sup>18</sup> There are limits to who or what is an acceptable object of  $\pi\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  and some are outside the bounds.

This is the final mention of the outgroup.<sup>19</sup> We have seen the rhetorical construction of this outgroup as one with wrong ideas, wrong actions, and removing themselves from fellowship with the audience of the letter. They are ultimately not to be trusted, on account of their message particularly, but also their actions. In the rest of the letter, there are echoes of this group, the designation of those with a differing view as liars (4:20; 5:10), but there is no further mention of a group. In view of the significance of  $\pi\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  in the letter, it is a fitting conclusion to describe the outgroup as outside the bonds of trust and belief.

In the process of excluding the outgroup, the author and the audience are brought into alignment. As Lieu argues, where the author has previously referred to the audience as ‘you’, in 4:1–6 they are now included with the ‘we’ of the author.<sup>20</sup> As well as being a warning against outsiders, the outgroup functions rhetorically to persuade the audience to fully align themselves with the position put forward by the author. At no point is a return to the ingroup envisaged by these outsiders, indicating the focus on reinforcing the right doctrine of the

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<sup>18</sup> Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 164; cf. M. M. Thompson, *1–3 John* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 118. Smalley sees it functioning more individually than communally. S. S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 215.

<sup>19</sup> Roitto notes that after this point there are no further references to either ‘they’ or ‘you’, and there is minimal reference to deviant behaviour, for by this point the audience are aligned with the author. Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 499.

<sup>20</sup> Lieu, “Us or You?: 813–5. The effect for the audience is that they must either agree with the author or become ‘them’ rather than ‘us’, an outsider. See also, Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 498.

audience, rather than attempting to call back those who have strayed. The exclusion of deviants serves to strengthen the group identity of those who remain.<sup>21</sup> The outsiders have departed, now it is up to the true insiders to show they belong by remaining part of the group.

## Christological Belief

Having seen where  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$  is not to be directed, as well as the evidence from the rhetorical construction of the outgroup that the purpose of the letter concerns insiders, we can now turn to the positive use of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$ , to see how it is used to evoke a response in the audience. As Christology is central to the division with the outgroup, so it is central to the positive use of faith language.  $\Pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$  is used repeatedly to draw attention to right propositional beliefs.

### *A Purpose of Encouraging Belief (3:23)*

The first use of the verb  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$  in 1 John 3:23 forms part of a summary of the main message of the letter. As noted with 4:1, here also the section begins with the direct address 'Αγαπητοί (3:21) which is an emphatic turning to the readers.<sup>22</sup> This section is written to address

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<sup>21</sup> While there is no command to active exclusion as in 2 John 10, the description of the outgroup as ‘not of us’ (2:19) is rhetorical exclusion. Philip F. Esler, “An Outline of Social Identity Theory,” in *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (eds. J. B. Tucker, et al.; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 24; Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 507; José M. Marques, Dominic Abrams, and Rui G. Serôdio, “Being Better by Being Right: Subjective Group Dynamics and Derogation of In-Group Deviants When Generic Norms are Undermined,” in *Small Groups: Key Readings* (eds J. M. Levine et al.; New York: Psychology Press, 2006), 159.

<sup>22</sup> R. W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 212; Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 123.

insiders, not the outgroup, reinforcing a connection between the author and his audience.<sup>23</sup>

The call to believe is combined with the call to love, as it is both believing in the name of Jesus and loving one another which is the singular command of God (3:23).<sup>24</sup> The command to love will be considered in more detail below (§3.1), but here we can observe that there is no logical or temporal connection between the two parts, so that it is inaccurate to state that love follows from belief.<sup>25</sup> Instead, for the author the right response to Jesus entails both correct Christology and correct living. While there is an aspectual distinction between *πιστεύσωμεν* (aorist) and *ἀγαπῶμεν* (present), with the latter case drawing attention to the ongoing nature of loving, it is overinterpreting the tense to argue, as Stott does, that the aorist indicates a single decisive act.<sup>26</sup> This is the only use of *πιστεύω* in the aorist in 1 John, and this may be patterned after the similar use in John 20:31.<sup>27</sup> It does not indicate belief as

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<sup>23</sup> Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, *1–3 John*, 109; Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 157; Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 127; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 199; Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 201. Schmid states that “a transgression in ethics is equivalent to a transgression in Christology”, and that 3:23 both links faith and love but also structures what follows in the letter. Schmid, “How to Read”: 40.

<sup>25</sup> As do Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 209; Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Stott, *Letters of John*, 151.

<sup>27</sup> While the text of John 20:31 is uncertain, it is more likely that the aorist is original. D.A. Carson, “Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 124, no. 4 (2005), 697, 708; G.D. Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20:30–31,” in *To What End Exegesis?: Essays Textual, Exegetical, and Theological* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

inceptive rather than ongoing.<sup>28</sup> Rather it depicts belief in a general, unmarked sense, and the subsequent uses of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$  in either the present or perfect tense-forms indicate that believing is ongoing.

The object of belief in 1 John 3:23 is ‘the name of his son Jesus Christ’, indicated with the dative. ‘Name’ is commonly understood as referring to the full significance of Jesus, including his character and authority.<sup>29</sup> The meaning of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$  here is close to that of  $\acute{\delta}\mu\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ , that it involves confessing and acknowledging Jesus (and thus his identity and authority).<sup>30</sup> The dichotomy of confessing or denying is used in a similar Christological context in 2:22–23 (cf. 4:15).<sup>31</sup> Thus, there is an element of the propositional here. However, rather than focusing on the propositional by conveying the object of belief with  $\delta\tau\iota$  (cf. 5:1,5),

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<sup>28</sup> The letter is addressed to those who already believe, making an inceptive reading unlikely. The tense-form itself does not reflect inceptive belief, as can be seen in the Gospel of John where in the construction  $\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha$  with the subjunctive of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\nu}\omega$ , the present subjunctive is used in relation to both unbelievers (John 6:29) and believers (John 13:19); similarly, the aorist is used with believers (John 11:15) and unbelievers (John 6:30). Therefore, each tense can be used for both continuing and inceptive belief.

<sup>29</sup> Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 158; Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 214–5; Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, 208.

<sup>30</sup> Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, 207; Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 59. Lieu similarly sees a question of personal commitment. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 158–9.

<sup>31</sup> Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 201. While Strecker sees the element of acknowledging, he dismisses the comparison to  $\acute{\delta}\mu\omega\lambda\omega\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ , arguing for a more existential interpretation, although this is influenced by a narrow concept of ‘confess’. Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 127.

the dative is used, suggesting an element of trust as well.<sup>32</sup> Thus,  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\bar{\nu}\omega$  here implies both an acceptance of Jesus' identity and a trust in his person.

The title given to Jesus is “his son Jesus Christ” (cf. John 20:31). As observed, the overlap with language of confession and denial points to a confessional, even creedal function of the titles.<sup>33</sup> Significantly, the titles are not elaborated—there is no reference to Scripture or fulfilment to indicate the background of the titles. Nor is there the sort of elaboration that we see in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, where the meaning of Messiah/Christ is conveyed through multiple parallel titles (John 1:29,34,45,49). There is some teaching regarding the Son in chapters 4–5, but the focus is more on the mission of the Son rather than his identity (1 John 4:9–10,14; 5:12).<sup>34</sup> The doctrinal statements of 1 John indicate familiarity with what the author considers true christological doctrine, perhaps through access to such teaching in the Gospel of John. This familiarity indicates that the aim of 1 John is not to teach right doctrine, but to affirm what is already accepted by the audience, that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God.<sup>35</sup>

### *Believing in 1 John 5*

Following 3:23, the remaining uses of  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\bar{\nu}\omega$  are predominantly found in chapter 5. 5:1–5 is framed by encouragements to continue believing in the identity of Jesus. In 5:1, it is to

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<sup>32</sup> Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 425–6.

<sup>33</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 208.

<sup>34</sup> This attention to the role of the Son supports Lieu's contention that 'Son' is the central part of Jesus' identity in 1 John. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 158.

<sup>35</sup> Schmid observes the contrast where John's Gospel can function missionally but 1 John assumes Christological kerygma. Schmid, “How to Read”: 32; cf. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 17.

believe that Jesus is the Christ, and in 5:5 to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, with the two statements together repeating the content of 3:23.<sup>36</sup> A doctrinal focus is evident as the object of belief is indicated with *ὅτι* in both these cases. The doctrinal emphasis continues with the connection between accepting the witness of God regarding the Son which is equivalent to believing in the Son (5:9–10). This is then reframed as a matter of believing God or (not) believing the testimony (5:10). In these verses, believing in the Son, believing God, and believing the testimony are equivalent, thus a key element of believing is accepting certain information as true.

The audience of the letter is identified as those who currently believe, as the author states that he has written to those who believe (*τοῖς πιστεύουσιν* 5:13). This is confirmed further by using perfect tense-forms. Both the author and audience are included in the first-person plural statement that “we have come to know and believe” (*ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν* 4:16). The use of the perfect tense-form with a stative lexeme highlights the inchoative sense, that their believing began in the past.<sup>37</sup> This instance is the only place in 1 John where a more relational focus to *πιστεύω* is evident. Beyond simply understanding God’s love, this indicates a reliance upon God’s love, and thus a trust in God’s faithfulness (cf. 1:9), as Thompson argues.<sup>38</sup> The inception of belief as a past event is also indicated by referring to those who believe as also those who have been born of God (*γεγέννηται* 5:1).

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<sup>36</sup> R. A. Culpepper, “The Pivot of John’s Prologue,” *NTS* 27, no. 1 (1980): 25–6.

<sup>37</sup> M. G. Aubrey, “The Greek Perfect Tense-Form: Understanding Its Usage and Meaning,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate* (eds. D. A. Black, et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 76–77.

<sup>38</sup> Thompson, *1–3 John*, 125.

Thus, the rhetorical function is not to persuade unbelievers or errant believers to return to the true faith, but to encourage continued adherence amongst those who remain within the group.<sup>39</sup>

## Active Faithfulness

The attention to right propositional belief is balanced in 1 John by a concern for ethical action, and that need for an active response is conveyed in part by the language of faith. The first and most obvious indicator of this comes in chapter one where God is described as faithful (*πιστός* 1:9). However, as will be argued, the idea of active faithfulness is also found in the reference to conquering faith in 5:1–5, an idea that finds parallels in Revelation.

### *Divine Faithfulness (1:9)*

The opening chapters of the letter have a strongly ethical focus, with exhortations to walk in the light and to love one another. The doctrinal elements that we have observed do not appear until the description of the christological denials of the outgroup in 2:21–23. It is in the context of exhortation to ethical action that the first reference to faith comes. In 1:9 there is a description of God as faithful and righteous (*πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος*) to forgive. *Πιστός* is an attribute of God in the OT, occasionally paired with righteous (Deut 32:4, LXX Jer 49:5 [42:5 MT]).<sup>40</sup> Yet in this context the focus is not merely on faithfulness as an attribute but as

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<sup>39</sup> Thus, we might question the extent to which the author seeks to win the audience to his position, as Lieu suggests. Rather, as Wendland observes, rhetoric can be used towards either continuity or change. In the case of 1 John, continuity is the aim. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 14; Wendland, “Rhetoric of Reassurance”: 176.

<sup>40</sup> Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 58; Thompson, *1–3 John*, 47–8; Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 21. Divine faithfulness is not solely a Jewish concept. The Greek gods could be understood as

action, on what God does more than who he is.<sup>41</sup> In the same way that the one who is righteous does what is right (2:29; 3:7), the one who is faithful is the one who acts faithfully, for the emphasis is on the way that God acts to forgive in fulfilment of his promises. It is not merely that God is reliable, but that he acts to forgive, just as he said he would.

The characterisation of God's actions as faithful come in the context of exhortations to loving action in the audience. This setting suggests that alongside the purpose of providing assurance of forgiveness to the audience, the description of God as faithful provides a model of faithful action for the audience to emulate. The parallel has just been made between God being light and the need to therefore walk in the light (1:5–7). This fits within a broader motif in 1 John of imitation, as seen in the call to love as God has loved (4:9–11; cf. 3:16; 4:19). The faithfulness of God contrasts with those who deceive themselves and who do not have the truth (1:8, 10). This contrast brings out the ideal of God's faithfulness more clearly. Thus, God's faithfulness serves as an example for imitation for the audience. In Social Identity terms, God is presented as the group exemplar, the one who models how a group member is to act.<sup>42</sup> The context of both God's active faithfulness and the ethical focus of the surrounding sections point to this faithfulness as being one of right action.

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models of trust (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.14.11–13; 2.8.23), worthy of trust ( $\alpha\xi\iota\sigma\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omega\iota$  Artemidorus, *Onir.* 2.69), and as proper objects of trust (Apollonius of Tyana, *Ep.* 33; Aelian, *Nat. an.* 13.21), contra Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 114; C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), 22–3. contra Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> A similar connection is made with the call to 'Be holy as I am holy' in 1 Peter by D. M. Shaw, *A People Called: Narrative Transportation & Missional Identity in 1 Peter* (PhD Thesis; University of Exeter, 2017), 106. Cf. A. Kuecker, *The Spirit and the "Other": Social*

Continuing through the letter, the ethical focus is sustained, even if not always the primary focus. As already noted, the outgroup is painted with a negative ethical brush (3:7–10). This is paired with positive ethical exhortations towards the audience, particularly centred on the call to love one’s siblings (2:10; 3:16; 4:7,11,21). While this is cast in general terms, as are the counter commands against physical and material desires (2:15–7), the author expects these commands to be understood in concrete terms such as meeting the physical needs of those in the group (3:17–18).<sup>43</sup> The failure to do right (*ποιεῖν δικαιοσύνη* 3:10) is a failure to love.<sup>44</sup> The use of family language (*ἀδελφός* 2:9–11; 3:10, 12–17; 4:20–21) and ‘one another’ (*ἀλλήλους* 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12) centres the ethical expectations upon actions

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*Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 29; E. R. Smith and M. A. Zárate, “Exemplar-Based Model of Social Judgment,” *Psychological Review* 99, no. 1 (1992): 3–21.

<sup>43</sup> Thus Roitto refers to love as cooperative and altruistic behaviour. Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 508.

<sup>44</sup> This means it is unhelpful to divide love from moral righteousness in 1 John, as does Stott, *Letters of John*, 152. Rather, in Second Temple Judaism, love was linked to ethics and law, and involved deeds such as mercy and fulfilling the law. B. M. Stovell, “Love One Another and Love the World: The Love Command and Jewish Ethics in the Johannine Community,” in *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement* (eds. S. E. Porter, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 441–4.

towards fellow group members.<sup>45</sup> Establishing expected behaviours functions to maintain and enhance group identity.<sup>46</sup>

The command to love is linked directly with faith in 3:23. The primary focus preceding this statement is ethical, indicated by the reference to both ‘keeping his commands’ and ‘doing what is pleasing in his sight’ (3:22). The latter gives a broad perspective of what is required—not merely adherence to a single command or set of commands, but rather a character of life.<sup>47</sup> There are parallels between 3:23 and the reference to the greatest commandments in the Synoptic tradition (Matt 22:36–40; Luke 10:25–28). While not identical, the call to believe indicates a similar orientation towards God, while the second command to love one another is effectively equivalent to the command to neighbour love. Thus, this commandment could be understood as summarising the ethical obligations of the law, contributing to a more concrete understanding of the scope of loving one another, embracing all the concrete ethical actions that the law requires.

### *Faith and Faithfulness (5:1–5)*

A critical passage for understanding the rhetoric of faith in 1 John is 5:1–5. Structural questions in 1 John are challenging, and some scholars place a division at the beginning of chapter five and interpret 1–5 with what follows, while others see a break at the end of verse

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<sup>45</sup> Roitto, “Identity in 1 John,” 513.

<sup>46</sup> While Esler distinguishes between ethics and norms, the expected behaviours in 1 John are all cast in ethical terms. Esler, “Outline of Social Identity,” 32.

<sup>47</sup> Thus van der Watt characterises the ethical demand of 1 John as “an obedient relationship with Jesus and not merely to live according to a list of expected rules.” J. G. van der Watt, “On Ethics in 1 John,” in *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles* (eds. R. A. Culpepper, et al.; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 221.

5 and take this section with the preceding material in chapter four.<sup>48</sup> Others place a break in the middle, or at the end, of verse four.<sup>49</sup> However, the christological confessions of 5:1 and 5:5 form an inclusio, as Culpepper argues, each containing one of the two key titles for Jesus (cf. 3:23), marking 5:1–5 as a unit.<sup>50</sup> Thematically 5:1–5 has affinities with both what

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<sup>48</sup> Those seeing a break at 4:21/5:1 include: Painter, *I, 2, & 3 John*, 289; R. E. Longacre, “Toward an Exegesis of 1 John Based on the Discourse Analysis of the Greek Text,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (eds. D. A. Black, et al.; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 276.

Those seeing a break at 5:5/5:6 include: J. A. du Rand, “A Discourse Analysis of 1 John,” *Neot* 13 (1979): 20, 24–5; Dodd, *Johannine Epistles*, 127; Griffith, *Keep Yourselves*, 83. On the problems of the structure of 1 John and various proposals, see the survey in M. D. Jensen, “The Structure and Argument of 1 John: A Survey of Proposals,” *CBR* 12, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>49</sup> Those seeing a break after 5:4a include: M. D. Jensen, “The Structure and Argument of 1 John,” *JSNT* 35, no. 1 (2012): 68–9; Strecker, *Johannine Letters*; Brown, *Epistles of John*, 592. Jensen’s argument includes the repetition of *καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν* (5:4, 11, 14) as indicating a section. Yet, in each case it functions as marking an explanation for preceding material, and thus it is highly unlikely that it would form the beginning of a new section in 5:4b. Those seeing a break at 5:4/5:5 include: Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 196; Schnackenburg, *Johannine Epistles*, 230; Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, 267. Jobes places the break after 5:3. K. H. Jobes, *I, 2, & 3 John* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 216.

<sup>50</sup> Culpepper, “The Pivot of John’s Prologue”: 25–6; H.-J. Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKK; Zurich: Benziger, 1991), 283. Wendland further argues that the repetition of key terms in 4:21 and 5:1, and then again in 5:5 and 5:6 suggest that 5:1–5 forms a unit. Wendland, “Rhetoric of Reassurance”: 207; cf Yarbrough, *I–3 John*, 277.

precedes and what follows. 4:7-21 has focused primarily on love, while 5:5-13 focuses more on belief. 5:1-5 forms a transition between these two, tying the two themes together.<sup>51</sup> Thus we will interpret 5:1–5 as a subunit that is connected closely to its context but that also has its own function in the rhetoric of the letter.

The beginning of chapter five marks a transition from the focus on love to a focus on belief. Yet the two concepts are entwined, as the initial mention of believing that Jesus is the Christ (5:1), is followed immediately by reference to loving both God and the one born of God. Love is defined as obedience and keeping God's commands, reinforcing the earlier statements indicating that love is practical ethical action linked to God's law. The writer assumes the audience already know what is expected, as the call to keep his commands is an old command they have had from the beginning (2:7). The ethical commands are also presented in the same terms as in 3:21–23, of loving one another and keeping God's commands. This reinforces the reading of 3:21–23 as summing up the purpose of 1 John, although here the active dimension is even more evident as the call is to do (*ποιέω* 5:2) rather than keep the commands (*τηρέω* 3:22).<sup>52</sup> Thus, the call to ethical action is a central theme in 5:1–5.

Following the ethical material, a new theme is introduced, that of overcoming (*νικάω* 5:4). In the context of overcoming the world (5:4–5), while the one who believes rightly (*πιστεύω*) is the one who overcomes (5:5), it is ἡ *πίστις ἡμῶν* that is the victory (5:4). The use of 'our' continues the shaping of ingroup identity, as those who are part of the group are those who have this *πίστις*. Many commentators read this *πίστις* as a matter of adherence to

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<sup>51</sup> Here Lieu argues that obedience is the content of love. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 202.

<sup>52</sup> Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 177.

right doctrine.<sup>53</sup> Undoubtedly there are doctrinal elements in view given the framing of verses one and five. However, it is essential to recognise that this is the only use of the noun  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  in either the Letters or Gospel of John, amidst a predominant use of the verb  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$ . Thus, it would stand out as distinctive to the audience.<sup>54</sup> As such, we must ask why the author might switch to the noun here and only here, rather than assuming the implications of the term.

An important feature of the noun is a broader semantic range than either the verb or the adjective. Nijay Gupta explores this semantic range in his book, *Paul and the Language of Faith*, depicting how the verb is primarily centred on trust/believe, the adjective on faithful, and the noun encompasses both meanings.<sup>55</sup> It is this versatility that in part gives

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<sup>53</sup> An emphasis on propositional belief is evident in: Thompson, *1–3 John*, 132; Streett, *They Went Out*, 236; Painter, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 99; Schmid, “How to Read”: 35; Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 182; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 266, 271; Brown, *Epistles of John*, 571–2; Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 229; Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 78. Less doctrinally, Lieu still focuses on an internal dimension, as  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  is contrasted with  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  as willing and doing. Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> The distinctiveness of this case is not substantially diminished by varied theories of authorship. Even if 1 John is pseudopigraphic, the author is consciously imitating the style of the Gospel, a pattern that is followed in the rest of the letter, the departure from the pattern here still suggests a purpose. Yet despite this, Painter sees the change as solely stylistic with no difference in meaning. Painter, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 298.

<sup>55</sup> N. K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 9–13. The breadth of meaning of  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  is also evident in Matthew Bates’ discussion of  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  as allegiance. M. W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 5–6; 79–80.

rise to the *pistis Christou* debate, for *πίστις* can mean either faith/belief or faithfulness. Aside from the contested *pistis Christou* phrase, *πίστις* is used to indicate faithfulness at other points in the New Testament, including Matt 23:23; Rom 3:3; Gal 5:22; Rev 2:19; 13:10.<sup>56</sup> The sense of faithfulness is even more prevalent in the LXX, accounting for around half the instances of *πίστις*.<sup>57</sup> While Yarbrough acknowledges that *πίστις* in Revelation can mean faithfulness, he asserts that 1 John maintains the separation of faith and acts of obedience, with such actions subordinated to faith.<sup>58</sup> Yet the absence of an argument for subordinating actions to faith, suggests that such a view comes from theological presuppositions as opposed to the text. Thus, rather than excluding a sense of active faithfulness, we must consider whether such a meaning may fit well with the context for *πίστις* in 5:4.

Context must shape how we read the theme of faith in 5:1–5. As argued above, the context in 5:1–3 is strongly ethical, priming the audience to be thinking in such ethical terms. In part then, a focus on *πίστις* as propositional may be influenced by those who divide the

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<sup>56</sup> Each of these are often translated as faithfulness in major English translations: Matt 23:23 (NIV, ESV, CSB, NET); Rom 3:3 and Gal 5:22 (NRSV, NIV, ESV, CSB, NET), Rev 2:19 (CSB, NIV84, CEB), Rev 13:10 (NIV, CSB, CEB). Titus 2:10 is also translated faithfulness in the CSB.

<sup>57</sup> The LES renders 28 out of 58 instances with faithful/faithfulness/faithfully and one as ‘loyalty’, while the NETS has 20 translations of the faithful/faithfulness form, along with 5 as ‘loyalty’ and 2 as ‘fidelity’, all of which similarly focus on an active rather than cognitive sense. Morgan observes the significant place for obedience in the Septuagintal use of *πίστις*. Morgan, *Roman Faith*, 210.

<sup>58</sup> Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 276–7.

text after 5:4a, as the focus of 5:5–13 is more propositional than ethical. 5:1–3 has also evoked 3:23 and the close connection of propositional belief and ethical action there.<sup>59</sup> The connection of belief and love in 5:1 is augmented by the repetition of  $\gamma\varepsilon\nu\nu\acute{\alpha}\omega$  with both believing and loving.<sup>60</sup> This strengthens the idea that the goal for the audience, their response that will overcome the world, encompasses both propositional belief and ethical action. The context of 5:1–3 along with the semantic range of  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  indicate the purpose behind the shift from  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\omega}$  to  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  here. The  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  that overcomes is both cognitive belief and faithful action.

The objection might be raised here that this could be illegitimate totality transfer. Illegitimate totality transfer is the interpretative error whereby the whole potential range of meaning of a word is imported into a single instance. In this case, that accusation does not hold for the two senses are both present in the immediate context, as well as being closely linked through the letter as a whole. It is not importing ideas that are used with the word  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  in other texts, but connecting the uses found in this Letter, and in this section of 5:1–5.

This interpretation is also consistent with the function of  $\dot{\eta}$   $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  in the passage. In 5:4,  $\dot{\eta}$   $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  is closely linked with  $\dot{\eta}$   $\nu\acute{\iota}\kappa\eta$ . In some sense the victory here is linked to Christ's victory (cf. John 16:33; Rev 5:8).<sup>61</sup> Brown argues that  $\dot{\eta}$   $\nu\acute{\iota}\kappa\eta$  here is a metonymy for 'the

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<sup>59</sup> Longacre notes the connections between 3:23 and 5:1, seeing both as statements of the macrostructure of 1 John. Longacre, "Toward an Exegesis," 276; cf. Painter, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 289.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, *1–3 John*, 129–30.

<sup>61</sup> Strecker, *Johannine Letters*, 179; Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 229.

power that enables victory'.<sup>62</sup> Yet the statement follows a similar pattern to several others in the chapter by beginning *αὕτη ἐστίν*. In 5:3, that phrase introduces an explanation of what it means to love God, which is to obey his commands. In 5:14, confidence before God is explained as taking practical form in the ability to ask God and be heard. Thus, here in 5:4, the phrase *αὕτη ἐστίν* introduces an explanation of the substance of *ἡ νίκη*, which is *πίστις*. To overcome the world is to endure in the face of the opposition that comes from that part of humanity who are opposed to God.<sup>63</sup> That endurance takes the form of both right belief and right action.<sup>64</sup> The letter's purpose in assurance indicates how the author can see the audience as those who have overcome the world, with the aorist participle *νικήσασα*, even as they are exhorted to continue in the sort of response to Jesus that overcomes the world.

The combination of the shift from the stylistically Johannine verb to the noun, the semantic range of *πίστις*, and the ethical focus of the immediate context leads to the conclusion that the noun is best understood here as faithfulness. It includes not merely continued adherence to doctrine but ongoing ethical action in accord with such faith. Its polysemy allows the author to tie together two key purposes of encouraging ethical action

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<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Epistles of John*, 570. Smalley also sees this as possible Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 270.

<sup>63</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 270. This idea is evident in the use of *νικάω* in Rev 2–3, especially in 2:26 where conquering is linked with ‘keeping my works to the end’ (οὐ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου).

<sup>64</sup> Lieu, despite emphasising an internal dimension to *πίστις*, hints at this broader range of meaning, referring to “their response and commitment that has embodied and realized that victory, and that is labelled *pistis*.” Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 207.

and doctrinal perseverance. Just as the outgroup err in theology and ethics, the ingroup are exhorted to both right belief and right action.

### *Faithfulness in 1 John and Revelation*

Support for this reading of  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  is found in Revelation. Revelation has often been counted as part of the Johannine writings, and setting aside the question of authorship, Revelation and the other Johannine writings arguably reflect a similar theological outlook.<sup>65</sup> As such, there may be commonalities in how the language of faith is used. In the letters to Smyrna and Pergamum there are references to faith or faithfulness ( $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  2:10,13;  $\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  2:13),<sup>66</sup> in contexts where there is a concern for both continued doctrinal adhesion (e.g.  $\delta\iota\delta\acute{a}\sigma\kappa\omega/\delta\iota\delta\acute{a}\chi\acute{h}$  2:14,15) and right action (2:15). Additionally, these letters set faithfulness alongside a call to overcome ( $\gamma\iota\chi\acute{a}\omega$  2:11,17). Both letters also encourage endurance to the point of death

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<sup>65</sup> This is demonstrated in similarity in vocabulary, including  $\sigma\chi\gamma\eta\acute{o}\omega$  (John 1:14; Rev 21:3),  $\delta\iota\psi\iota\varsigma$  (John 11:44; Rev 1:16), and  $\phi\acute{o}\eta\acute{v}\iota\varsigma$  (John 12:13, Rev 7:9), as well as theological concepts with the Gospel and Revelation the only NT texts that describe Jesus either as ‘Word’ (John 1:1; Rev 1:2; 19:13), or as ‘lamb’ (John 1:29, 36; Rev 5:6,8,13). Amongst recent interpreters, the strongest case for connecting the two texts is made by John Behr, *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 74–75.

<sup>66</sup> In 2:13 the expression is  $\tau\acute{h}\nu\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma\mu\omega$ , which may be a variation on *pistis Christou* (cf. Rev 14:12). Aune and de Silva have argued that these refer to faithfulness to Jesus. D. E. Aune, *Revelation* (WBC; 3 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1997–1998), 2.837–8; D. A. DeSilva, “On the Sidelines of the  $\Pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma\chi\acute{r}\iota\sigma\tau\o\tilde{\iota}$  Debate: The View from Revelation,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies* (eds. M. F. Bird, et al.; Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2009).

(2:10,13), implying an active response as purely internal beliefs are unlikely to provoke potentially lethal opposition. Then, in the following letter to Thyatira *πίστις* is listed in a series of works of this church (2:19), referring to faithfulness, in alignment with the outward and active nature of the other things in the list. In the absence of other instances of *πίστις* in either the Letters or the Gospel, Revelation provides the closest parallels to reconstruct how the author and audience of 1 John understood *πίστις*. The parallels add weight to the argument that in 1 John *πίστις* encompasses both active and doctrinal ideas, and that both ethics and doctrine are involved in overcoming the world.

## Conclusion

In 1 John, faith language is used to persuade those who remain within the group to continue believing correctly and acting correctly. First, faith language in 1 John is directed to those within the group. It is not used to persuade towards right belief for an unbeliever, or to correct those who disagree. Rather, the doctrinal teaching in 1 John serves to establish boundaries, reinforcing a division between the outgroup and those who remain. Second, faith language is used to encourage the audience to continue to hold to right doctrine. This doctrinal focus is largely summarised in Johannine terms, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The nature of the presentation assumes the audience understand and hold to this teaching already, and they need encouragement not to depart from it. This encouragement is effected by describing doctrinal difference as a key factor in the division with the outgroup, so that to diverge from the view advocated by the author is to put one's self outside the group. Third, the use of faith language is not limited to a cognitive aspect, as faith language is used to encourage the audience to right action as well. The model of God's faithfulness, along with the use of *πίστις* as a means to include both the cognitive and active

aspects that are prominent in the letter, combine to exhort the audience to both doctrinal and practical faithfulness.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The connection between the language of faith and ethics is consistent with what has been argued with regard to the Gospel of John, see C. Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief and Graeco-Roman Devotion* (WUNT II; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 113–5; S. Brown, “Believing in the Gospel of John: The Ethical Imperative to Becoming Children of God,” in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John* (eds. S. Brown, et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).